



POLICY REPORT  
DEVELOPMENT AND BUILDING

Report Date: February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2011  
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VanRIMS No.: 08-2000-20  
Meeting Date: March 15, 2011

TO: Vancouver City Council  
FROM: Director of Planning in consultation with the Director of Legal Services  
SUBJECT: Heritage Designation - 620 Keefer Street - 'The Bezzasso House'

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- A. THAT the building at 620 Keefer Street, listed in the 'B' evaluation category on the Vancouver Heritage Register, be designated as protected heritage property.
- B. THAT Council instruct the Director of Legal Services to bring forward for enactment a by-law to authorize the heritage designation of the building located at 620 Keefer Street.

**GENERAL MANAGER'S COMMENTS**

The General Manager of Community Services RECOMMENDS approval of A and B.

**COUNCIL POLICY**

- *Heritage Policies and Guidelines (April 18, 1991)*

**PURPOSE AND SUMMARY**

The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval to designate the existing building at 620 Keefer Street, listed in the 'B' evaluation category on the Vancouver Heritage Register, as protected heritage property. As incentive for and compensation to the Owner for the designation, an increase in permitted density from 0.95 floor space ratio (FSR) to 1.04 FSR is proposed, which is nine percent (9%), or 393 square feet, over the permitted density, along with a number of other *Zoning and Development Bylaw* variances as set forth in Development Application Number DE414137. The Director of Planning, as authorized under the *Zoning and Development Bylaw*, is prepared to grant the requested variances, subject to Council approval of the proposed heritage designation of 'The Bezzasso House'. The Director of Planning will

also require, as a condition to the development permit, that the owner is to agree, by way of a covenant to be registered on title to the lands, to restore the heritage building.

### ***BACKGROUND***

The site at 620 Keefer Street is located in the Strathcona neighbourhood in an RT-3 zoning district (see the map in Appendix 'A'), which generally permits One-Family and Two-Family Dwellings, Infill Dwellings, and Multiple Dwellings in some cases. The site is comprised of a 25 foot wide parcel (which is typical for the area) and a 12.5 foot wide parcel for a total site width of 37.5 feet. It is 122 feet deep and is 4,573 square feet in area. The existing heritage building straddles the common property boundary of these parcels (the parcels will be consolidated as part of the application approval process). A twenty foot wide lane exists at the rear of the property.

### ***DISCUSSION***

#### **Heritage Value**

The existing heritage building, listed in the 'B' evaluation category on the Vancouver Heritage Register, is valued for its rich aesthetic features and for its long association with the Bezzasso family, and the history of immigration in the Strathcona Community (see the photos in Appendix 'B'). It was built in 1902 by William Cline for an Irish immigrant named John Clendenning who had become a foreman at the Hastings Mill. Joseph Vicars, a friend of Mr. Clendenning and fellow mill foreman, built a comparable house (which still exists) next door at 612 Keefer Street in 1905. These houses are good examples of both the burgeoning wealth of the middle class in the City during the first decade of the last century, and the association of the neighbourhood with the industries of the nearby waterfront during that period.

The historical assessment of the site by the Heritage Consultant notes that first few decades of the twentieth century saw a large influx of Italian immigrants to the neighbourhood and that Angela Bezzasso bought the house at 620 Keefer Street from Mr. Clendenning's son in 1938. According to information provided by the Bezzasso family, during the tough times of the 1940s, Mrs. Bezzasso made ends meet by taking on boarders and lodgers, mostly loggers and miners, as well as members of Italian families who had recently immigrated (see the photo on page 2 of Appendix 'B'). She also supplemented her income, as did many during that time, by selling homemade wine and re-selling hard liquor out of the house, an activity which eventually saw her spend some time in jail (which she apparently considered a vacation). Her story is not unusual. The legacy of the Italian bootlegging culture of the period is an important part of the history of the Strathcona community, for which the house is also associated. The Bezzasso family has owned the house and lived in it for over seventy-two years and will continue to do so. The long association of the house with the Bezzasso family is important and the house is proposed to be named after the family to reflect this.

The house features many original late-Victorian and early-Edwardian details such as its decorative fretwork and trims, bay windows, multi-paned original wood windows, original siding, mouldings, fascias and soffits, as well as its front and rear porches. Features also include its asymmetrical form and faceted front façade. Investigation of the structure of the building suggests that the house originally had a turret on the north-east corner, similar to other late-Victorian houses in the area, including the 'Strathcona School Principal's Residence' at 620 Keefer Street nearby. The turret on 'The Bezzasso House' appears to have been removed sometime after 1938. However, the rest of the house has changed little since it

was built. Although the interior is not proposed to be designated, much of the original interior details and finishes survive, including original hardware, fittings, doors, trims, balustrades, "servants stair", and plaster wall finishes, which will all be retained for the most part.

### Development Application and Proposed Incentive

The zoning applicable to the site is RT-3. The zoning permits infill development on sites which are at least 4,498 square feet in area. The site at 620 Keefer Street is 4,573 square feet and therefore infill development may be considered. The development application proposes to rehabilitate the heritage building and construct two, small Infill One-Family Dwellings at the rear of the property. The heritage building is to remain a One-Family Dwelling. It is proposed that the incentive and compensation to be provided to the Owner for heritage designation will be in the form of a *Zoning and Development Bylaw* variance of permitted density. An increase in permitted density from 0.95 FSR (4,344 square feet) to 1.04% FSR (4,737 square feet) for the site is proposed, which is nine percent (9%), or 393 square feet, over the permitted density (see the Technical Zoning Summary in Appendix 'E'). A number of other minor variances of the Zoning and Development By-law and the RT-3 Guidelines are proposed, as well as a relaxation of one off-street parking space (three spaces are required and two are proposed). The Director of Planning is authorized under the *Zoning and Development Bylaw* and *The Parking By-law* to grant the proposed variances and is prepared to approve the development application subject to Council approval of the designation of the heritage building. The Director of Planning will also require, as a condition to the development permit, that the owner is to agree, by way of a covenant to be registered on title to the lands, to restore the heritage building.

### Compatibility with Existing Zoning, Land Use Regulations, and Guidelines

The Intent of the RT-3 zoning district schedule is to:

*"... encourage the retention of neighbourhood and streetscape character, particularly through the retention, renovation and restoration of existing character buildings. Redevelopment is encouraged on sites with existing buildings of style and form which are inconsistent with the area's pre-1920 architecture. Emphasis is placed on the external design of additions to existing buildings and new buildings to encourage the preservation of the historic architectural character of the area. Floor area incentives are included to achieve the creation of affordable housing and the rehabilitation of original buildings which are important to the neighbourhood's character."*

The rehabilitation of the proposed heritage building contributes to the historic architectural character of the Strathcona Neighbourhood. Staff conclude that the proposal is consistent with the intent of the RT-3 Zoning District Schedule and the RT-3 Guidelines.

### Condition of the Property and Conservation Approach

The existing building is in very good condition and much original material and details survive. The rehabilitation work primarily encompasses repairs. A few windows have experienced some deterioration and will have to be repaired or replaced with new wood windows matching the existing ones. However, most windows are in very good condition and are being maintained. The building is to be repainted and new roofing installed. As well, the floors of all the deck

and porch areas need to be refurbished, and in the case of the upper floor balcony, some improvements installed to make the deck safer. Staff support the conservation approach as it achieves a very high level of retention with minimal changes to the exterior and interior fabric, and conclude that the proposal is consistent with the federally adopted Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada.

### **Results of Neighbourhood Notification and Review of the Application**

Seventy-seven surrounding property owners were notified of the development application and a site sign was installed. Two responses were received, including one from the Strathcona Zoning Committee who support the application but have concerns regarding "FSR creep", or the gradual increase in on-site bonus density in excess of 0.95 FSR awarded on heritage sites in the neighbourhood. The other response expressed concerns over the amount of the bonus density being sought and the precedent it might create, the lack of setbacks for the infill buildings, the site coverage, and the impacts of the infill buildings on neighbours (see the Comments from Neighbourhood Notification and Staff Responses in Appendix 'F').

The density is nine percent (9%) over the permitted density which is compatible with other development in the area and which is similar to other heritage projects in the neighbourhood where additional density has been granted. The modest density bonus provides an incentive for the owner to conserve the heritage building and commit to its long term preservation. The overall density and size of the infill buildings are consistent with other infill development in the area. The side setbacks of the infill buildings have been varied in order to increase the depth of the open rear yard and allow more daylight access into the site and into the rear yards of the adjoining properties. The proposed site coverage complies with the maximum permitted in the zoning. The development application does not create a precedent for further density increases on other sites. Staff conclude that the additional bonus density proposed is commensurate with the conservation of the existing heritage building, and that the setbacks and size of the infill buildings are supportable.

### **Comments from the Vancouver Heritage Commission**

On November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010, the Vancouver Heritage Commission reviewed the development application for 620 Keefer Street, including the Statement of Significance and the Conservation Plan, and unanimously supported the proposal (see Appendix 'D' for the full resolutions of the Vancouver Heritage Commission).

### **Financial Proforma Evaluation**

Real Estate Services staff reviewed the applicant's proforma evaluation in accordance with Council's approved policies. The Director of Real Estate Services advises that the proposed variances requested by the applicant as compensation for the heritage encumbrance on land value are supportable and provide no undue profit.

### **Greener Buildings Policy**

The City's "Rezoning Policy for Greener Buildings" does not apply to the application as a Heritage Revitalization Agreement and/or rezoning is not required. However, staff encourage owners involved in applications such as this to seek registration and certification with BuiltGreen BC™ and to achieve BuiltGreen BC™ Gold with a score of EnerGuide 82, or an

equivalent achievement in green design. It should be noted that changes to the Vancouver Building By-law to improve "green" performance will still be applicable to the project.

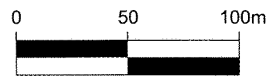
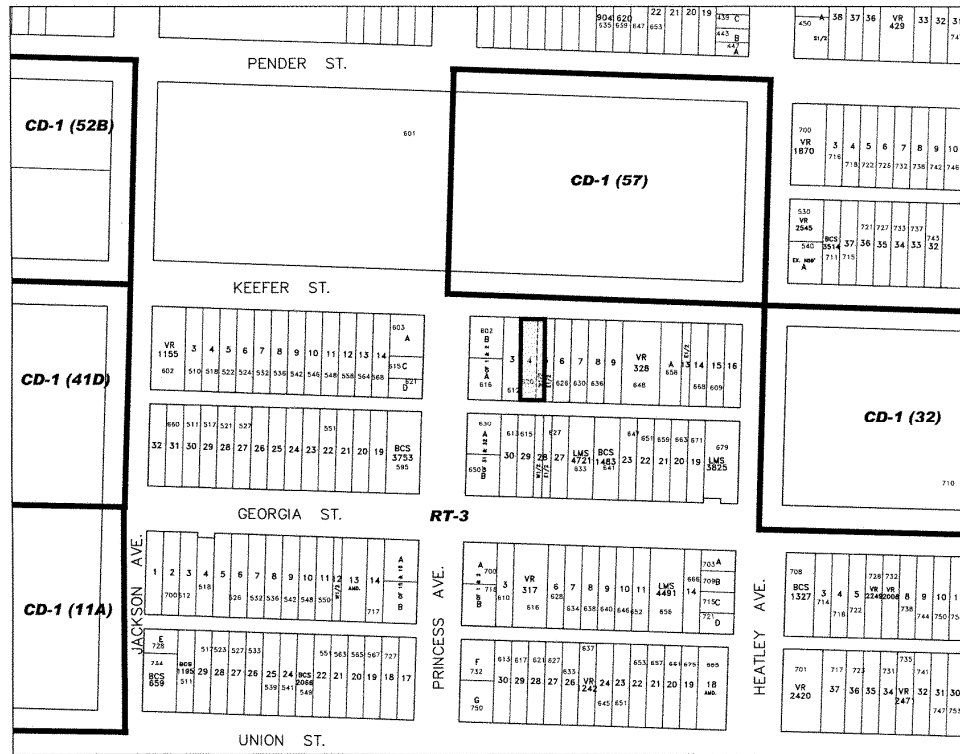
#### *FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS*



The approval of the report recommendations will have no financial implications with respect to the City's operating expenditures, fees, or staffing.

#### *CONCLUSION*

The recommended designation of the building at 620 Keefer Street, which is listed in the 'B' evaluation category on the Vancouver Heritage Register, will protect the building from inappropriate exterior alterations and from demolition. The Owner has agreed to accept the proposed variances as compensation for the designation of the building. Therefore, it is recommended that Council approve the designation of 'The Bezzasso House' at 620 Keefer Street.

\* \* \* \* \*



Zoning Boundary   
Site 

Site: 620 Keefe Street  
City of Vancouver  
Planning Department

Date: 2010/ October 22  
Drawn: JB



Site Map



Front of 'The Bezzasso House' at 620 Keefer Street (2010)



Close Up of the Front of 'The Bezzasso House' (2010)

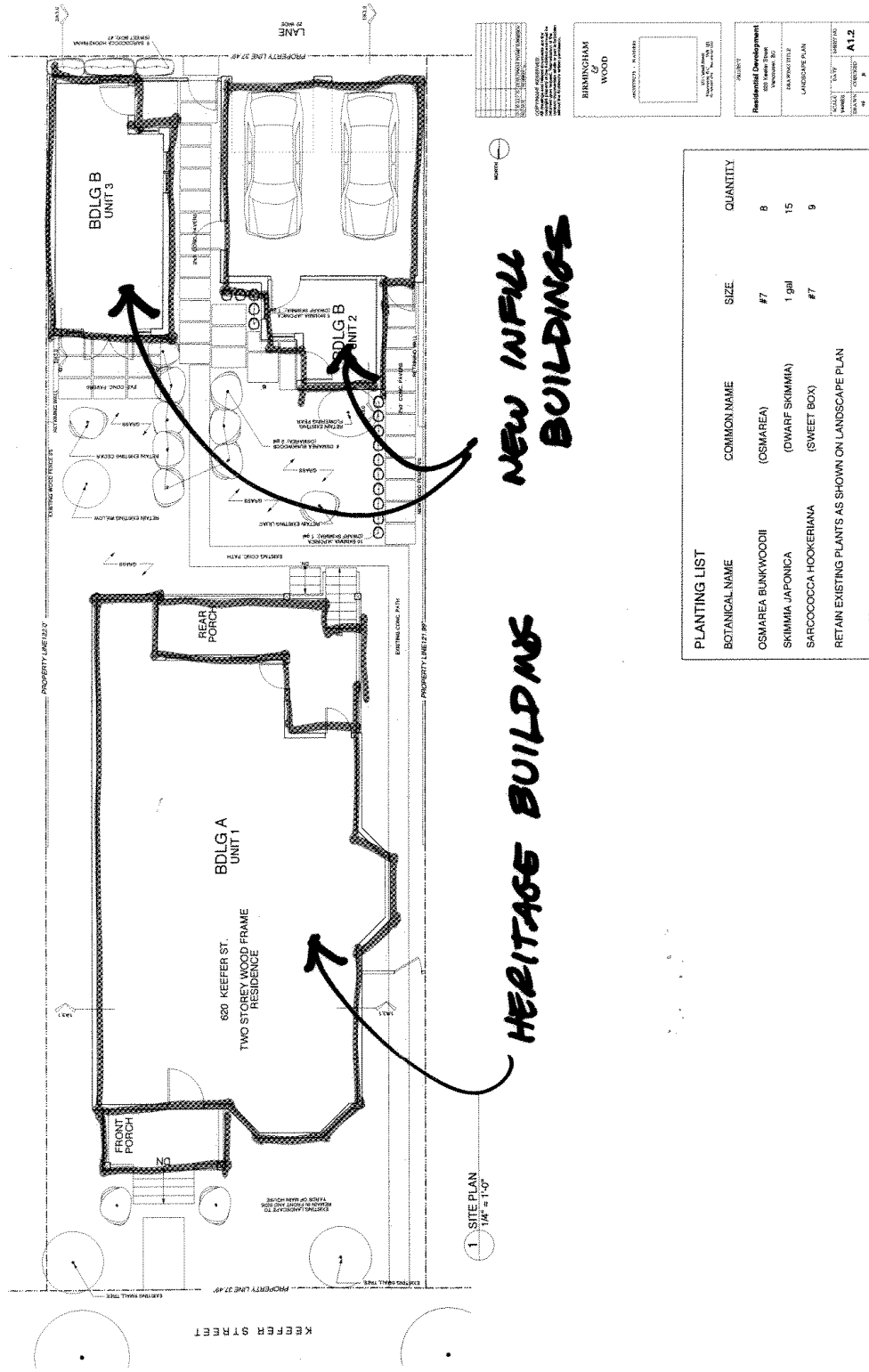


Rear of 'The Bezzasso House' (2010)

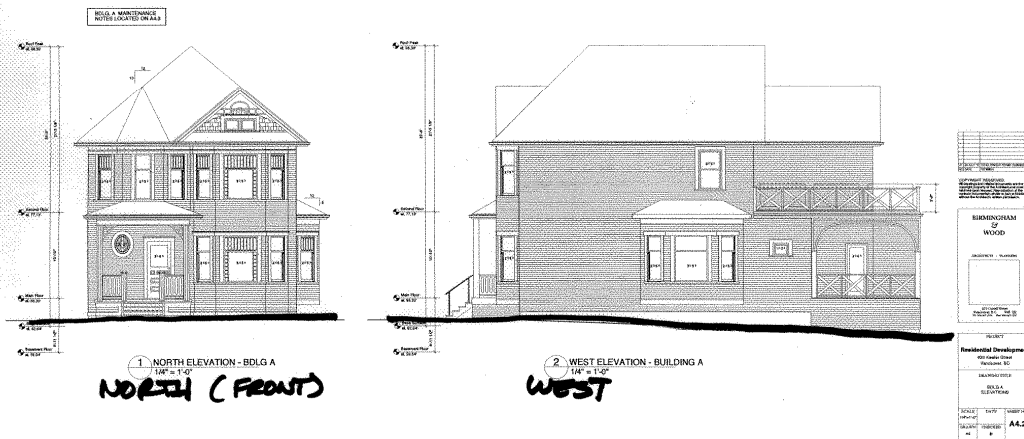


Boarders at 'The Bezzasso House' in the 1940s

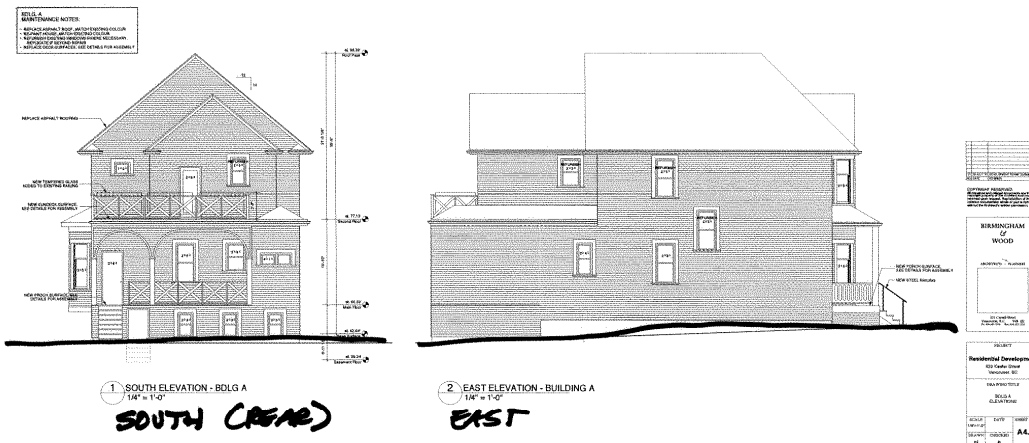




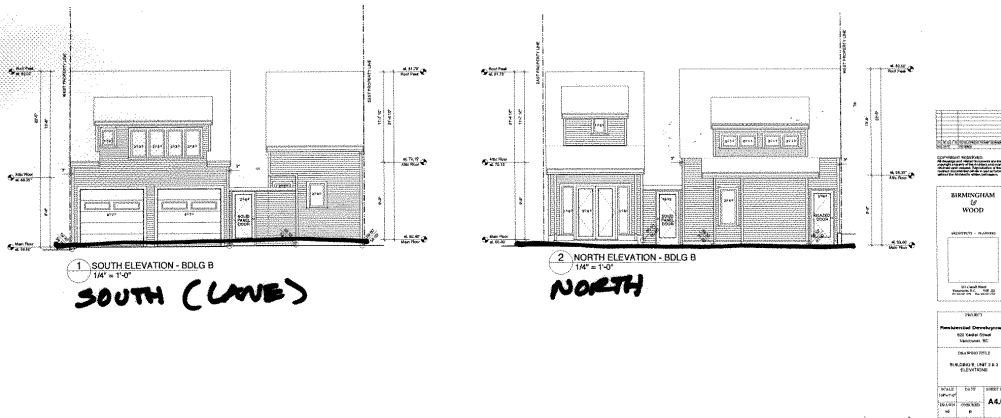
**SITE PLAN - 620 KEEPER ST.**



**ELEVATIONS — HERITAGE BUILDING**



**ELEVATIONS — HERITAGE BUILDING**



**INFILL BUILDING ELEVATIONS**



**INFILL BUILDING ELEVATIONS**

Comments of the Vancouver Heritage Commission:

On November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2010, the Vancouver Heritage Commission reviewed the application, including the Statement of Significance, and resolved the following:

THAT the Vancouver Heritage Commission supports the Statement of Significance and overall proposal for the project at 620 Keefer Street as presented at the November 22, 2010, meeting; and

FURTHER THAT the Commission supports the Floor Space Ratio (FSR) increase and the one stall parking relaxation in exchange for designation; and

FURTHER THAT the Commission encourages staff to consider a further relaxation to allow for the attic staircase to be retained rather than removed.

*Note: while efforts to explore retention of the attic stair will be explored, it may have to be removed if deemed to be unsafe.*

**Technical Zoning Summary:**

**Table 1: RT-3 District Schedule and the Parking By-law Summary**

Regulation or Use	Existing	Permitted	Proposed
Residential Uses	One-Family Dwelling	One and Two-Family Dwellings and Infill Development	Heritage One-Family Dwelling and Two Infill One-Family Dwellings
Site area to allow Infill development	4,573 sq. ft.	4,498 sq. ft. minimum	4,573 sq. ft.
Height of the Heritage Building	35.75 ft.	35.1 ft. maximum	35.75 ft. (existing)*
Floor Space Ratio	3,669 sq. ft. (0.80 FSR)	4,344 sq. ft. (0.95 FSR) maximum	3,669 sq. ft. (Heritage Building)+ 1068 sq. ft. (Infill buildings)= 4,737 sq. ft. (1.04 FSR)*
Site Coverage (50% conditional)	2,077 sq. ft. (approximate)	2,287 sq. ft. maximum	2,287 sq. ft.
Off-street Parking	2	3 spaces required	2*

\* variance required

**Table 2: Variances of the RT-3 Guidelines**

Guideline Item	Permitted/ Required	Proposed
Width of infill structures	30.17 ft. maximum	32 feet*
Site area to allow Infill development	4,498 sq. ft. minimum	4,573 sq. ft.
Width of principal facades	20 feet maximum	20 feet (Unit 2)
Width of rear portions of an infill building	20 feet within 5 feet of a lane, the rest setback 5 feet.	32 feet within 2 feet of the lane*
Rear Yard Open Space	20 feet deep minimum	20.1 feet
Side setback to an infill building	9.84 feet minimum	3 inches for both infill buildings*
Infill zone	Infill development to be within 37 feet of the rear property line	33 feet
Setback at the lane	5 feet minimum except for parking structures	2 feet*
Height of Infill Buildings	27.9 feet maximum	22.5 feet highest point
Unit density	5 dwelling units maximum (108 units per hectare)	3 dwelling units

\* variance required

### Comments from Neighbourhood Notification and Staff Responses

Seventy-seven surrounding property owners were notified of the development application and a site sign was installed. Two responses were received, including one from the Strathcona Zoning Committee who support the application but have concerns regarding “FSR creep”, or the gradual increase in on-site bonus density in excess of 0.95 FSR awarded on heritage sites in the neighbourhood. The other response expressed concerns over the amount of the bonus density being sought and the precedent it might create, the lack of setbacks for the infill buildings, the site coverage, and the impacts of the infill buildings on neighbours. The specific concerns are listed below with staff responses:

*1. Approval of the application will contribute to “FSR creep” or the gradual increase in on-site bonus density in excess of 0.95 FSR awarded on heritage sites in the neighbourhood.*

Staff Response: Ten sites containing heritage buildings exist in the 600 Block of Keefer Street and East Georgia Street (the block across the lane). Three of these sites have had infill development approved in the last ten years and the approved densities range from 0.94 FSR to 1.10 FSR. The proposed density for 620 Keefer Street is 1.04 FSR which is 9% over the permitted density. The proposed density is similar to other infill development on heritage sites in the area which has occurred in the last ten years.

*2. The approval will set a precedent for other sites in the neighbourhood.*

Staff Response: Staff assess applications where bonus density is proposed for heritage conservation on a case by case basis. The amount of density to be considered is based on a number of factors including a financial assessment of the costs of heritage conservation, the overall design and impact on surrounding properties, and the capacity of the site to accommodate the proposed density. Approval of the application for 620 Keefer Street will not create a precedent for heritage applications in the future.

*3. The site is eligible for 0.95 FSR where infill development is proposed and therefore additional density should not be awarded for the site as the zoning already “protects” the heritage building by allowing more density.*

Staff Response: Bonus density is permitted for heritage conservation as compensation to an owner for heritage costs and the financial encumbrance created by heritage designation (including retaining the house as a One-Family Dwelling). The modest increase in density of 9% over the permitted 0.95 FSR provides an incentive to the owner to conserve and designate the heritage building as protected heritage property. The City’s Real Estate Services staff have reviewed the financial proforma associated with the application in accordance with Council’s approved policies and conclude that the proposed variances requested by the applicant as compensation for the heritage encumbrance on land value are supportable and provide no undue profit.

*4. The Infill development is too large and the site coverage is too great.*

Staff Response: The application proposes two small infill buildings, one which is 560 square feet and one which is 508 square feet, for a total of 1,068 square feet. Of the heritage development sites mentioned in item (1) on the previous page, the range of approved infill building area is 980 square feet to 1,736 square feet, with an average of 1,280 square feet. The average dwelling unit size in these infill buildings is 914 sq. ft. The proposed infill building and dwelling unit sizes are similar to, or smaller than, infill buildings recently approved in the area. The proposed site coverage complies with the maximum conditionally permitted 50% limit (see the Technical Zoning Summary in Appendix 'E').

*5. The infill buildings lack sufficient setbacks.*

The RT-3 Guidelines require side setbacks of 9.84 feet for an infill building where a 50 foot wide site is proposed. However, infill development is permitted on sites which have a minimum width of 37.5 feet (which is the site width of 620 Keefer Street). In such cases, reduced setbacks are usually approved. In this case due to the length of the existing heritage building, reduced side setbacks allowing for the infill buildings to be located up to the side property lines are proposed to allow for the increased depth and openness of the rear yard which will allow more daylight into the back of the site and into the rear yards of adjoining properties. The massing of the infill buildings has been broken up to reduce the visual impact of the buildings both at the lane and facing into the site.

The guidelines also require that, other than parking structures, infill buildings be setback 5 feet from the lane. In the case of 620 Keefer Street, a setback of 2 feet is proposed in order to "pull back" the upper floor massing of the infill buildings to allow light into the rear of the site and into adjoining properties. The locations of the infill buildings are approximately the same as that of existing accessory buildings on the site which extend right up to the east and west property lines, and therefore there would be no loss of existing open space in these areas (see the photo of the rear of the site on page 2 of Appendix 'B'). No concerns were received from immediately surrounding neighbours. Staff reviewed the impacts of the proposed setbacks and concluded they are supportable.